

HIS NARROW ESCAPE.

For Once Ferguson's Brain Acted Quickly Enough.

"George Ferguson," sharply exclaimed his wife after the visitor had gone, "I wouldn't for worlds be as big a hypocrite as you are!"

"In what way," he demanded, "have I been acting the hypocrite?"

"You know well enough. When Cousin Jerry showed us the picture of the young woman he is going to marry you said, 'She's as pretty as a picture' and you know she is homely enough to loosen the paint on a brick wall."

George scratched his chin and reflected a moment.

"Mrs. Ferguson—madam," he said, "don't accuse me of hypocrisy. She is as pretty as a picture—her own picture."

Even then it did not occur to Mrs. Ferguson to retort that this explanation didn't help him any, as the photograph surely was retouched.

And an opportunity for crushing a husband, once lost, never turns up again.—Chicago Tribune.

Felicitous.

A New England man who flatters himself upon his aptness in saying the proper thing at the proper time recently revisited his old home in Vermont, whither he has not gone in ten years or more.

Among those he met during the first day of his visit was a coquettish spinster, who, with a simper, said:

"I'm Miss Mullins. You don't remember me, of course."

"Remember you!" exclaimed the New England gallant. "As if I could help doing so, Miss Mullins! Why, you are one of the landmarks of the town!"—Harper's Weekly.

Not What He Meant.



Waiter (who has just served up some soup)—Looks uncommonly like rain, sir.

Diner—Yes, by Jove, and tastes like it too! Bring me some thick soup.—Tattler.

Sentiment Versus Sense.

Tom—Miss Peachly is rather sentimental, isn't she?

Jack—I hadn't noticed it.

Tom—Well, she is. She keeps every letter she gets from the sterner sex.

Jack—Oh, that isn't sentiment; it is good, hard breach of promise sense.—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Extravagant.

"John, I've got to have money to buy a new hat for Easter."

"Great Scott, Jane, but you're extravagant. What did you do with all the money I gave you last year to have your old hat fixed over?"—Baltimore American.

Earning His Fee.

By COLIN S. COLLINS.

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"What are you doing here, Alma?" demanded Blake as he ran across his little hostess in the conservatory.

Mrs. Thearle lifted a tear stained face to Blake's. In spite of her three unhappy years as the wife of Osmund Thearle, who had obligingly drunk himself to death in the third year and left her with her youth and a round million of dollars, Alma still was pathetically a child in many ways.

"It's perfectly horrid," she said sobbingly. "I had planned to have this dance a sensation, and now—"

"It is perfect," declared Blake warmly. "Every one is saying that the arrangements could not be improved upon."

"That's just it," was the tearful response. "It was all going so nicely, and now that horrid Count Cazman has spoiled it all."

"He has been annoying you?" Blake's face grew stern, and his hands clinched. Ever since they were children together he had loved Alma. That this somewhat repulsive scion of nobility should offer her affront was not to be borne.

"He hasn't said anything to me," explained Mrs. Thearle, "but I don't believe that he is a count, for all his splendid letters of introduction. He stole Bessie Vardon's bracelet. You know the one I mean, the one with all the diamonds. I saw him slip it from her wrist. She does not know yet. She thinks she lost it. I have asked her to say nothing about it for the moment, and I came here to think what I could do."

"Send for a policeman," suggested Blake grimly.

He was resentful of the count's manner toward Alma, and he would be glad to see the public humiliation of his rival.

"Heavens, I can't do that!" gasped Mrs. Thearle. "Don't you see, Paul,



"I'D GLADLY PAY BESS THE COST," GASPED MRS. THEARLE.

that if I should even accuse the count he would make a scandal, and that is the last thing I would wish for at my first entertainment since—since—"

"Since freedom came," Blake finished for her. Thearle's death had been a matter of congratulation to more than his widow.

"It a sort of second debut," she ran on. "The count is a sort of star feature, and to have him discovered as a thief would be to make the whole affair a failure."

"So it would," agreed Blake, "and yet we cannot get that bracelet back without some sort of a scene. It's not fair to Bess to let him get away with the spoils. It's easily worth \$20,000."

"I'd gladly pay Bess the cost," gasped Mrs. Thearle; "but, don't you see, I can't do so without explaining why I should make good her loss."

"And that would never do," agreed Blake. "The question is, What shall be done?"

"That's what I want you to tell," was the trusting answer. "You have never failed me yet, Paul, even when—"

Blake nodded. No need to put into words the memories of those troublous times when he had intervened to save her from the drunken whims of the man her parents had forced her to marry.

"I think I have an idea," he said after a moment of thought. "I don't suppose the count knows that you saw him?"

"I was on the other side of the room and with my back turned. I saw him in the mirror. He took it off Bessie's wrist and slipped it into the breast pocket of his coat."

"We used to have a lot of fun over my magic," Blake said reminiscently. "It's hardly the thing for a ballroom, but you might ask me to do a few tricks."

"And borrow the bracelet of the count?" she asked hopefully.

"Something like that," was the laughing answer. "I believe that you have a bracelet a little like Bess'. Well, put

it on and lend it to me with a ask for it."

Mrs. Thearle clapped her hands. "I knew that you would think out some way," she declared. "Shall I ask you

as soon as we get back to the ballroom?"

"In about a quarter of an hour," he explained. "Don't let it look too cut and dried."

Blake slipped out of the conservatory by another door, and his surprise was well simulated when he was asked to perform a few tricks. Mrs. Thearle had only to make the suggestion, for the other guests eagerly took up the matter. Paul Blake had at one time thought of going upon the stage, for he was a more than ordinarily clever performer, and only the unexpected inheritance from a great-uncle had headed off a professional career.

Of late he had refused all requests to perform in drawing rooms, as the demands upon his good nature had become too frequent, so there was the promise of novelty in his performance after two seasons of retirement.

He rapidly arranged his improvised stage with a couple of tables and such simple properties as he could obtain from his hostess, while the guests stopped dancing to crowd around and watch his really clever work.

"Here's a new one," he announced after he had performed a routine of familiar vanishments and appearances. "For this I want a piece of jewelry—a watch, a ring, anything."

A dozen articles were offered, for a number of times he had drawn upon the audience for handkerchiefs and other small loans. Without seeming to make any particular selection Blake took the bracelet that Mrs. Thearle offered and palmed it while he pretended to wrap it in a borrowed handkerchief, which he gave to Mrs. Thearle to hold.

"You are positive that you feel the bracelet in the handkerchief?" he asked, and Mrs. Thearle in answer to an almost imperceptible nod declared in the affirmative. Blake gave her closed hand a tap with the fan he used as a wand.

"Do you feel it now?" he asked. Mrs. Thearle gave a well simulated cry of surprise and at Blake's direction unrolled the handkerchief to show that it was empty.

"If the count will oblige me by taking the bracelet from his pocket, Mrs. Thearle will identify it as her property," announced Blake, stepping toward the surprised foreigner.

Before the count could act he had thrust his hand within the pocket and obtained possession of the stolen bracelet. A quick pass and the bracelet which he had borrowed from Mrs. Thearle was in Blake's hand and the other was in his pocket.

Later the stolen property was conveniently found by a servant and handed to its owner, and Blake's trick was not thought of in connection with the find.

"It was beautifully done," praised Mrs. Thearle as he lingered after the rest had gone. "No one suspected. I just knew that if I accused the count he would insist upon making a scene. He is that sort of man."

"As it was, he found the trick a decided surprise," said Blake, with a reminiscent laugh. "It was worth the trouble just to see his face."

"It was worth more than that," was the warm response.

"I'm glad you think so," said Blake, taking possession of her hand. "For I am going to ask the highest fee I have ever demanded. I want nothing less than you, Alma."

"I think you have earned your fee," she said stately.

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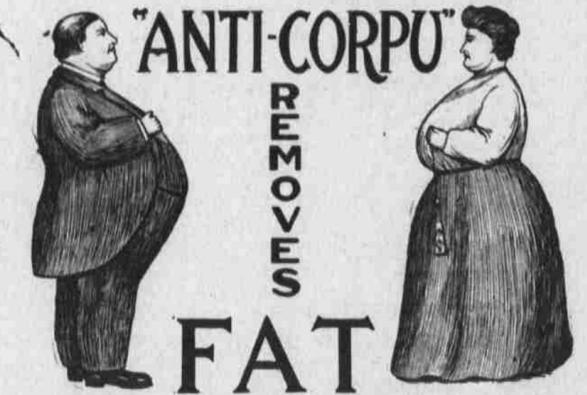
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